

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 219336

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LI, XF

SUBJECT: LIBERIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

1. MINFINANCE TOLBERT SOUGHT PERSONAL CHAT TODAY WITH ASST. SEC. NEWSOM TO EXPLAIN "TO OLD FRIEND" LIBERIA'S RECENT BREAK IN RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL. IN ASST. SEC. NEWSOM'S ABSENCE, TOLBERT MET WITH DEP. ASST. SECRETARIES ROSS AND SMITH.

2. TOLBERT SAID GOL'S POSTURE ON MIDDLE EAST HAD BEEN TO ATTEMPT MAINTAIN DIALOGUE WITH ALL SIDES IN HOPE OF PLAYING USEFUL MEDIATING ROLE LATER ON. FOR THAT REASON LIBERIA HELD OFF SO LONG FROM BREAK WITH ISRAEL. EVEN IN ANNOUNCEMENT SEVERING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS, GOL DEvised PRECISE WORDING WHICH IT HOPES WILL PROMOTE NEGOTIATIONS LATER ON AND PERMIT EASY TRANSITION BACK TO NORMAL
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DIPLOMATIC TIES WITH ISRAEL. IMPORTANT PHRASE, TOLBERT

SAID, IS ISRAEL MUST WITHDRAW FROM ALL ARAB LANDS "ILLEGALLY OCCUPIED", THUS PERMITTING ISRAEL TO OCCUPY-STRATEGICALLY IMPORTANT TERRITORY WHICH MAY BE ACQUIRED LEGALLY-THROUGH NEGOTIATION.

3. DECISION TO BREAK RELATIONS ARRIVED AT 2 NOVEMBER AFTER FOLLOWING DEVELOPMENTS:

A. GOL BEGAN TO FEEL ITS EFFECTIVENESS AS MEDIATOR THREATENED BECAUSE IT WAS ACQUIRING IMAGE OF BEING TOO CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH ISRAEL. RUMORS WERE BEGINNING TO SPREAD, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT LIBERIAN FLAG SHIPS WERE CARRYING ARMS TO ISRAEL. MORE IMPORTANT, THE EGYPTIANS WERE BEGINNING TO REFUSE EVEN TO TALK TO GOL.

B. GOL GOT WORD THAT ARABS "WOULD FIND WAY OF EXPRESSING RESENTMENT" IF RELATIONS CONTINUED WITH ISRAEL. GOL RECEIVED INTELLIGENCE REPORTS THAT CERTAIN LIBERIAN LEADERS INCLUDING PRESIDENT TOLBERT MENTIONED AS POTENTIAL TERRORIST TARGETS. GOL ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT POSSIBLE ARAB OIL BOYCOTT. MINFINANCE TOLBERT SAID NEGOTIATIONS OCCURRED SOME TIME AGO WITH NIGERIA FOR ALTERNATE SUPPLY OF CRUDE, BUT THAT WOULD REQUIRE EXPENSIVE TECHNICAL CHANGES IN LIBERIAN REFINERY TO PROCESS HIGH GRADE NIGERIAN PRODUCT OR AGREEMENT WHICH NIGERIAN GOVT. "HESITANT" TO GIVE PERMITTING GOL TO SWAP NIGERIAN FOR LESSER GRADE CRUDE. IN ANY EVENT, TOLBERT SAID OIL PRICE INCREASE AND OTHER SPINOFFS OF RECENT MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT HAD SET GOL'S DEVELOPMENT PLANS BACK TWO YEARS.

4. RE GOL CONTRIBUTION TO UNEF, TOLBERT SAID LIBERIA'S ORIGINAL WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE DAMPENED WHEN GOL LEARNED CONFIDENTIALLY THAT EGYPT WOULD OBJECT FOLLOWING ISRAEL'S "UNDIPLOMATIC" ANNOUNCEMENT THAT LIBERIAN PARTICIPATION WAS ACCEPTABLE TO TEL AVIV. NONETHELESS, GOL WILL MAKE CONTINGENT AVAILABLE IF SECURITY COUNCIL UNANIMOUSLY REQUESTS. MINFINANCE SAID HE HAD INSTRUCTIONS TO PREPARE CONTINGENCY FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS.

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5. COMMENT: SEEKING APPOINTMENT WITH PRESIDENT TOLBERT'S "AWARENESS" IF NOT HIS INSTRUCTIONS, MINFINANCE WANTED TO ASSURE USG THAT LIBERIA HAD NOT BASICALLY ALTERED ITS FOREIGN POLICY WHICH IS HARMONIOUS WITH USG'S, THAT IT REMAINED BASICALLY FRIENDLY TOWARD ISRAEL, THAT DECISION TO BREAK RELATIONS RELUCTANTLY TAKEN AFTER ALL OTHER OPTIONS IN GOL'S VIEW PROGRESSIVELY CLOSED, AND

THAT GOL HOPES NORMAL DIPLOMATIC TIES WITH ISRAEL CAN BE
RE-ESTABLISHED SOON. DISASSOCIATING HIMSELF FROM
MOBUTU ANALOGY, TOLBERT REMARKED THAT FRIENDS ARE SOME-
TIMES BETTER ASSOCIATES THAN BROTHERS "WHOM YOU CANNOT
CHOOSE". RUSH

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